

# IDEAS AT *Work*

COMPUTERS/HILLEL SEGAL

## Polaroid floppy disks offer rare safeguard

What does a latecomer do when offering a generic product in an already saturated market?

That was the formidable marketing problem faced by Polaroid Corp. last year when it decided to enter the floppy disk business. At the time, there were literally dozens of major brand, minor brand and obscure brand diskettes — all fighting it out in the marketplace.

Since floppy disks are used all the time by millions of personal computer users, and since we always seem to need more for backups and new files, new diskettes are in constant demand. All computer dealers and mail-order houses carry them, and the buyer commonly takes whatever brand is available. So how could Polaroid distinguish themselves?

Indeed, until recently, if you would have asked me about the various brands, I would have said there is little difference between the major and minor brands, so just find the best price. Since business data is too important to trust to obscure brand diskettes, I would have advised against them. And, until Polaroid got established, I probably would have advised against their new diskettes, too.

What changed by mind was an incredible new service offered by Polaroid for buyers of their brand diskettes, called **DataRescue**.

If any one of your Polaroid floppy disks is damaged — by spilled coffee, sticky fingerprints, dust, smoke, ashes or whatever — Polaroid will quickly recover your data and return it to you on a new diskette. Best yet, there is *no charge* for the service. They will even send it back to you by Federal Express if that's the way you sent the damaged disk to them.

To prove their point, the company asked a group of experienced PC users to do "their worst" to some diskettes, and allow the Polaroid engineers to attempt to retrieve the data.

The users proceeded to load the diskettes with data and then fold, spindle, mutilate, freeze, thaw and even staple them. They wrote directly on the exposed portion of the

pany put coffee, soap and chewing gum on a diskette, and he also reported 100 percent data recovery. His only expense was 56 cents for postage to mail the diskette.

According to a company spokesman, Polaroid has an almost 100 percent success rate in recovering data. All the damaged diskettes submitted for the tests were recovered, except for two that were only partially restored. In both cases, the diskettes had been riddled with staples.

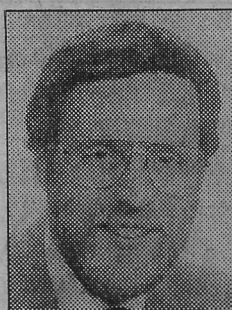
"Once the magnetic particles are gone, that's the end of the game," said the spokesman. "We're not magic — we can't put back what's not there." Even so, they managed to recover all the data except for the areas where holes had been made by the staples.

Polaroid cites a real-life case that's also impressive. Here's the story, as related by Marcia Polese, president of Polese Clancy, a Boston-based graphic design firm. "My golden retriever, Matthew, chewed by diskette and ran away with it," she says. "A timely business proposal was stored on the diskette. After finding both the dog and the diskette, I sent the diskette to Polaroid's data recovery facility. In two days, I received the diskette back with 100 percent of the data reconstructed."

On top of the DataRescue service, Polaroid offers a 20-year warranty on the products, which is comforting, if not extreme. I suspect that Polaroid is counting on us to forget about the warranty after a few years.

Without a doubt, the marketing problem that Polaroid started out with was beautifully overcome with their new DataRescue service. I know of no other company offering a similar service, and have personally begun using their diskettes as a result.

*Suggestion:* If you use your personal computer for business purposes, seek out the Polaroid diskettes the next time you need to buy a box. They might be a bit more expensive than some of the obscure brands, but they seem to be about the same price as the other



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rectly on the computer. He used magnetic media with ballpoint pens, dropped them in soapy water, and otherwise had a good time with the test.

Here are some of the results:

✓ One magazine editor froze a diskette in a block of ice and thawed it out in a microwave oven. "The diskette was actually warped from the heat. It wouldn't even fit into the disk drive," he said. He reported that 98 percent of the data was restored.

✓ A vice president of a New York bank tested the service by putting condiments and ashes under the diskette jacket cover. He got 100 percent of the data restored.

✓ The owner of a supply com-

major and minor brand diskettes.

Begin by switching over to the Polaroid diskettes for your day-to-day work, relegating your current diskettes for off-site backup purposes. The real value of the DataRescue service seems to be for the diskettes you use all the time, which are more prone to accidents and damage.

Remember, the techniques to recover data from damaged disks are much different from the techniques to recover data that's been accidentally or mechanically erased. It is possible to recover erased data if the area on the disk has not been overwritten by new data, but that's not included in the DataRescue service.

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